

This is a summary of the replies given by those attending the “Seeking the Face of Christ” meeting at Our Lady’s Church Hall on Tuesday 12th June 2007. The summary is in two parts.

Part 1. These are the replies given during the whole group discussion in reply to the two principal questions running throughout the series of meetings. The questions are:

What do you think God is calling you to do in your parishes deaneries, schools, religious communities or other groups to make this a reality?

What do you think should be included in Diocesan pastoral guidelines to enable parishes and deaneries to live their Christian calling?

The responses were:

Use our individual talents to enable us all to work together for the benefit of all.

We must be more friendly – more welcoming – more tolerant and less critical of other people’s views.

Be more joyful – let the joy and pride we have in our religion and community be open and apparent to all.

More social events – especially in celebration of feast days.

Hold Parish missions. Organise (more) Parish pilgrimages / retreats.

Be more ecumenical – more dialogue with others.

The challenge is to reach out to others both within our own community and to other communities.

Promote a sense of belonging. Nobody will join us if they don’t feel that they are welcome and belong with us.

The main theme was that we must organise ourselves and our community life in such a way that it is apparent to others that we live the true meaning of the Christian life, that we enjoy living it, and that it is open to others to join in and live it with us.

Part 2. These are the replies given by the individual groups in response to the series of questions specific to this evening’s discussion. (Three sheets of answers were handed in.)

Question. Do you first of all think of yourself as an individual or as a member of a community?

Responses. Both individual and as member of community.

Mostly individual – sometimes as a member, but not always so.

Both – being a member of a community helps us to value ourselves as an individual.

These responses tie in with the answer in the group discussion that we all have individual talents that can be used for the benefit of the whole community.

Question 2. Thinking back on your life, what positive experiences of “community” have you had?

Responses. Support for children as evacuees and being part of a Catholic community led by a wonderful priest.

Support from the whole community.

Parish support in times of grief. Charismatic conference. Taize, Lourdes, family.

Family life, marriage, school, Church support, Diaconate, Army life.

The responses indicate that all have had positive and valuable experiences of community life.

Question 3. Is the Church a community for you?

Responses. Very definitely – wouldn’t be here if it weren’t.

Faith unites the Church community as a world community.

Visiting other countries helps us realise that the Church is one big community.

Assuming that the question relates to the local Church, the answer is yes, but not as much as it should be.

There is a lack of interaction to the level that there could be.

The previous priest’s focus on the tradition of the Catholic Church made the move to a more “parishioner focussed” activity and interaction a slow process. (Note that there were other parishes represented at this meeting and it is not apparent to which previous priest this refers.)

The general theme of these responses is that the Church is a community but not as much as it could or should be.

Question 4. The early Church was an inclusive community. People worked for the common good. They witnessed to Christ through the way they lived. Breaking bread together, sharing – Christ at the Centre. What could we do to make people in our parishes aware of the mysteries of the Church?

Responses. There is scope for more celebration as a parish through social events and celebration of feasts. The early Church helped each other in ways that are picked up by the welfare state these days.

Way of life – being joyful – quietly praying.

By example – by caring, being open and welcoming – by tolerance.

The general idea seems to be that by leading by example and showing a good community spirit, others will want to get to know more about the Church's way of life. A bit of praying does no harm either.

Question 5. Is there anything in the way we celebrate our liturgy or live Christian lives which conceals the face of Christ from the world?

Responses. Needs to be relevant to young people.

Ecumenical.

Poor liturgy and poorly prepared liturgy can conceal The Face of Christ.

When we sin.

When we are not welcoming we conceal the Face of Christ.

The move away from Latin was good. No need to bring it back.

As a Church, we need to make ourselves more relevant, be seen to be more in tune with modern society, not to be afraid of change, to be more open to those outside our own Church. The truths of the Church remain eternally valid, but must be expressed and made known in a way that will cause people today to embrace them as something relevant and meaningful to them.

Question 6. What could we do in our parishes that would allow the Face of Christ to shine?

Responses. Be there for people – smile, friendly, welcoming, understanding of young people, more open to others' views, less critical,

Taking Communion to the sick.

Show respect to the homeless, pastorally and practically.

Parish mission – inviting local people – personal contact.

Corpus Christi procession.

The general theme is that we must be open and welcoming to others, particularly those from outside our own Catholic faith. We must reach out to others and be less critical of and more open to others' views.

Question 7. What practical effect does our understanding of "a spirituality of communion" have for ecumenical dialogue.

Responses. Common baptism – worship the same Christ.

Stations of the Cross of Good Friday.

Spirituality of communion makes ecumenical dialogue a necessity and not an option.

There was general agreement that sometimes we, as Catholics, must reach out to share our faith with others. There was an almost diametric split among the group on the subject of sharing Holy Communion with Christians of other churches or participating in other churches' communion services.